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Stage Reviews

Duet for one

Back Alley Theatre
indefinite run

By LAURA HITCHCOCK

A world-class violinist who contracts multiple sclerosis is an appallingly tragic subject. It's to the credit of playwright Tom Kempinski that his two-character play, "Duet for One," is combustible and feisty, and that its ending in neither maudlin nor placatory but satisfying and down to earth. It's a well-made literal play, predictable in pattern.

Stephanie (Linda Kelsey), the stricken musician, is sent by her husband to consult therapist Feldman (Allan Miller) for "support and guidance." True to the tenets of therapy, the doctor refers Stephanie to herself for support and guidance. She begins in a falsely hearty vein with several worthy alternate plans for her shattered life and runs the gamut from rage and scathing cynicism to a contempt for her body — beginning with not changing her clothes and underwear for days and ending in an affair with the plumber.

Feldman, a composed and logical man, maintains his professional distance until the moment when he feels his client slipping off the slope of despair into dissolution. Then he begs her to fight beside him for survival, attacks her attitudes and tries to convince her that the purpose of life is *life*.

It's a slip of the mask and Miller makes the most of it in a piercingly believable characterization.

Kelsey's luminous beauty brings poignancy to the stricken musician. She understands the nuances of the role and gives her all to the difficult, lengthy part. A certain weight is missing — an aura of genius that's impossible to reproduce by inflections.

Ron Satlof directed with an acute sensitivity to the moods of the characters and the rhythms of the piece.

Christopher M. Idoine's sets, Joseph N. Tawil's lights and Martha Burke's costumes are all right on, interpreting a warm and affluent ambience in which warmth and money are useless.